

The Fall of the Evil Empire: The Reagan Administration, European Transnationalism, and the End of the Cold War

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Introduction

“Mr. Gorbachev Tear Down This Wall!” President Reagan’s challenge to Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev in his 1987 speech at the gates of the Berlin Wall singularly restored America’s image as a beacon of hope and freedom on the global stage and resonated powerfully with diverse peoples suffering under the oppression of Soviet Communism and of the free world alike. How did the Reagan Administration contribute to the fall of the Soviet Union? One body of scholarship argues that President Reagan’s hard-line policies created clear external pressures that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR); however, another, which stresses a more Russian-centric mode of analysis, argues that the USSR was destined to eventually fail regardless of American interference due to various internal factors.¹ Both schools of thought respectively overemphasize and underestimate the influence of the U.S. government and of the Kremlin in contributing to the fall of the USSR while not heeding the roles of other non-American/non-Russian actors/diplomatic channels in contributing to the end of the Cold War. Thus, a more neglected area of study is the question of the extent to which America’s European allies influenced the evolving rhetoric and diplomacy of the Reagan Administration towards the Soviet Union.

In other words, how did the diplomacy and rhetoric of the Reagan Administration incorporate other non-American diplomatic channels and influences as it sought to improve relations with the USSR? In tackling this question from a more transnational and/or Europe-centric lens, I hope to contribute to a currently lacking scholarship on the U.S. and its allies’ cooperation in bringing about the fall of the Soviet Union. By analyzing primary materials such as President Reagan’s presidential speeches during his second term and (less-examined) case studies of American cooperative ventures with various non-American actors/states in response to Russian aggression, I will argue that the Reagan Administration’s unique flexibility in its Cold War rhetoric and diplomacy was informed by a more international and transnational perspective than commonly realized. The way in which the Reagan Administration utilized non-American points of view in its diplomacy and rhetoric, to protect and promote the interests of its European allies and Eastern Europeans, illustrated a multilateral component in the Reagan Administration’s foreign policy that defied traditional principles about U.S.-Russian relations that had been associated with American liberal or neoconservative diplomatic thought. I will also frame the shifting attitude of the Reagan Administration towards Russia as a case study within the broader

¹ D. Deudney, & Ikenberry, ‘Who Won the Cold War?’, *Foreign Policy*, (87) (1992), pp. 123-138.

context of Western foreign policy doctrine on U.S.-Russian relations and analyze the extent to which U.S. foreign policy towards Europe and Russia under the Reagan Administration mirrored or departed from the foreign policies of past presidential administrations. Finally, I will argue that the willingness of the Reagan Administration to incorporate the viewpoints of its allies and even of its rivals in its diplomacy and rhetoric, which defied the political expectations placed on it by its domestic supporters or critics, marked an unusual exercise of American and Western European soft power that brought about an end to the Cold War and the fall of the USSR.

Traditional School of Historiography

The traditional school of historiography claims that the policies of the Reagan Administration placed immeasurable pressure on the USSR to compete with America to the point where it collapsed under the resulting duress of its own excesses. John Lewis Gaddis' *The United States and the End of the Cold War*, a seminal work in Cold War historiography, identifies certain guiding, neo-realist principles that directed the foreign policy of the Reagan Administration towards Russia and which ushered in the USSR's eventual demise.² Peter Schweizer's *Reagan's war: The Epic Story of his Forty year struggle and final triumph over communism*, as well as his *Victory: the Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, present a classic America-centric, grand strategy narrative of how the Reagan Administration's confrontational approach towards Russia brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union.³ As noted by Eric Petersen, traditional scholars associated with the neorealist school of thought and supporters of Reagan 'give less attention to conditions inside the Soviet Union. The defenders of the most ideologically anti-communist of administrations pay little heed to the economic and political problems generated by seventy years of communist rule. They particularly disparage the role of Mikhail Gorbachev'.⁴ The specific problem associated with the grand strategy narrative of the Cold War is the overwhelming focus on the role of any one nation-state when the dynamics of historical events were much more transnational. As exemplified by Jack Matlock's *Reagan and Gorbachev : How the Cold War Ended*, some scholars admit that the subtlety of Reagan's overtures towards Gorbachev played a crucial role in bringing an end to the Cold War, but these works rarely consider Reagan's discussions with other non-American or non-Russian actors to bring the Russians to the negotiating table.⁵ The traditional school overemphasizes the dominance of American military power in forcing an end to the Cold War

² J. L. Gaddis, *The United States and the end of the Cold War* (New York, NY, 1992), pp. 131, pp. 165-6.

³ P. Schweizer, *Reagan's war: the epic story of his forty year struggle and final triumph over communism* (New York, NY, 2003); P. Schweizer, *Victory: the Reagan Administration's secret strategy that hastened the collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York, NY, 1994)

⁴ E. F. Petersen, 'The End of the Cold War: A Review of Recent Literature', *The History Teacher*, 26 no. 4 (1993), pp. 471-85.

⁵ J. Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: how the Cold War ended* (New York, NY, 2004).

when the diplomacy and rhetoric of the Reagan Administration was much more multifaceted, nuanced, and even multilateral than commonly understood. Likewise, revisionists often point to Gorbachev and his inner circle of reformers in liberalizing the Soviet communist system of government without properly acknowledging the role of external influences, namely America and its European allies, in exacerbating the internal weaknesses within the Soviet Union that led to its collapse.

Revisionist School of Historiography

Revisionist historians often overstate the role of Gorbachev's reforms in bringing about the fall of the Soviet Union, and they also argue that the Soviet Union was on a downwards spiral before the Reagan Era. For example, Robert McMahon's *The Cold War* argues that it was Gorbachev, by abandoning the Brezhnev Doctrine and by cutting down military spending, who played the most essential role in bringing about the downfall of the Soviet Union.⁶ Other historians are quick to criticize the notion that an arms-buildup by the U.S. government provoked a drastic change in Soviet foreign policy. For example, an article by Thomas Risse Kappan challenges the 'conventional wisdom that the end of the Cold War represents a victory for Western strategies of "peace through strength" or at least "containment"'.⁷ Similarly, Matthew Evangelista's scholarship argues that Gorbachev and his inner circle were responsible for radically altering the direction of Soviet foreign policy from a former, traditional stance of aggression associated with the Brezhnev Doctrine to one of moderation aimed at reconciliation with the West.⁸ D.T. Thomas' *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights and the Demise* argues that the Soviet government's ratification of the Helsinki Final Act, an international human rights agreement, legitimized the preexisting surge of opposition activity towards Communism that led to the downfall of the USSR.⁹ In advancing the claim that the shift in Soviet foreign policy resulted from a change in attitude on the part of Gorbachev and his advisers, the revisionist school of thought rarely considers the role of other actors from non-Russian spheres of influence in contributing to the end of the Cold War. In their search for a one-sided answer as to why the Cold War ended and their over-emphasis on the role of one particular nation-state, both schools of thought fail to seriously consider the subtlety, nuance, and multi-pronged nature of the Reagan Administration's rhetoric and diplomacy which, contrary to traditional understanding, maintained an international/transnational outlook on America's relationship with Europe and the USSR.

⁶ R. McMahon, *The Cold War: a very short introduction* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 160-162.

⁷ T. Risse-Kappen, 'Did "Peace Through Strength" End the Cold War?', *International Security*, 16:1 (1991), pp. 162.

⁸ M. Evangelista, "Sources of Moderation in Soviet Security Policy," in Philip E. Tetlock, et al., eds., *Behavior, Society, and Nuclear War*, vol. ii (New York, 1991),

⁹ D. C. Thomas, *The Helsinki effect : international norms, human rights, and the demise of communism* (Princeton, 2001)

The traditional school of historiography too readily stresses the role of American hard power in forcing an end to the Cold War while the revisionist school deemphasizes America's contributions to defeating the USSR and overemphasizes Gorbachev's reforms. These schools of thought may also be more informed by political biases than commonly realized. Neoconservatives associated with the traditional school glorify Reagan's legacy as a Cold War warrior, as well as the exercise of American hard power. On the other hand, revisionists informed by a more liberal political orientation are quick to undermine what they perceive to be another stereotypical, historical tale of American exceptionalism.¹⁰ Beth Fischer's *The Myth of Triumphalism* presents a unique perspective on America's role in ending the Cold War; while she does not deemphasize the role of the Reagan Administration in hastening the Soviet Union's collapse, she eschews the traditional perspective and argues that American foreign policy towards the Soviet Union under the Reagan Administration was much more multilateral and less hawkish in its approach than traditional historians assume.¹¹ By presenting a one-sided focus on either the role of the U.S. government or the Kremlin in ending the Cold War, both schools of thought tend to overemphasize the grand strategy narrative of Cold War historiography in which the actions of certain nation-states tend to predominate the historical literature. Such an interpretation fails to take account of the more nuanced aspects of the Reagan Administration's diplomacy and rhetoric, which espoused a transnational/international outlook that intended to improve America's image on the world stage in the eyes of its allies and rivals.

Patricia Clavin's 'Defining Transnationalism' presents the concept of transnationalism as 'not as fostering bounded networks, but as creating honeycombs, a structure that sustains and gives shapes to the identities of nation-states, international and local institutions, and particular social and geographic spaces.'¹² In applying such a methodology to the historical events surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Union, one can classify the Reagan Administration's stance towards Europe and the Soviet Union as a transnational policy, perceiving of the Iron Curtain as a certain kind of honeycomb that was ripe for the fall of communism and the rise of democracy within the former Eastern bloc.

Transnational Influences on and Responses Towards the Cold War Rhetoric of the Reagan Administration

Although President Reagan's rhetoric in his first term espoused a traditional neoconservative perspective of hawkishness towards Russia, his speeches in his second presidential term gradually displayed more of an international/transnational outlook aimed at improving America's relationship with its European allies, Eastern European peoples beyond the Iron Curtain, and the Russians. By initially framing the United States' opposition towards the USSR on the global stage as a fundamental and ideological battle between

¹⁰ J. W. Knopf, 'Did Reagan Win the Cold War?', *Strategic Insights*, v. 3, issue 8 (August 2004), pp. 10.

¹¹ B. Fischer, *The Myth of Triumphalism: Rethinking President Reagan's Cold War Legacy* (University Press of Kentucky, 2020).

¹² P. Clavin, 'Defining Transnationalism', *Contemporary European History*, 14(4) (2005), pp. 421.

the forces of good and evil in various speeches, President Reagan's Cold War rhetoric and diplomacy at the beginning of his first term overturned years of established U.S. foreign policy doctrine on U.S.-Russian relations and reinforced earlier divisions between the West's sphere of influence and the Soviet sphere of influence.¹³ Departing from the rhetorical tradition of his most immediate predecessors, who had called for a more moderate tone of peaceful coexistence with the USSR in their own addresses, Reagan's speeches espoused a form of aggression that was unprecedented in American foreign policy rhetoric. Echoing the oratory of Winston Churchill's Iron Curtain Speech, Reagan's address to the British Parliament at Westminster in 1982 grandly proclaimed that Communism would fall astray in its goal of surpassing Western democracy. In a mark of respect towards the United Kingdom, he voiced his admiration for long-standing British democratic traditions that were the antithesis of the worldwide spread of Communism.¹⁴ His 1983 Evil Empire speech, delivered at an evangelical conference in Orlando, Florida, declared that the USSR was 'an evil empire' and defended NATO's decision to deploy missiles in response to Soviet nuclear proliferation in Europe. While noting that President Reagan's desire to negotiate with the Soviets ultimately transcended the hawkish rhetoric of his first term, John Lewis Gaddis' scholarship argues that his use of the phrase 'evil empire' marked the beginning of a confrontational stance towards the Soviet Union, precipitating its final collapse.¹⁵ However, by singularly overemphasizing the impact of the Evil Empire speech or other speeches similar to it, Cold War historians continually present a problematic, one-sided narrative of American exceptionalism triumphing over Soviet Communism in the end of the Cold War. As Gaddis himself partially concedes, such an interpretation ignores the nuance of President Reagan's Cold War diplomacy and rhetoric. Both possessed a unique international/transnational outlook that bore important ramifications for America's relationship with Europe and the USSR. By stressing cooperation with the Soviet government and Eastern Europeans rather than confrontation, President Reagan's speeches during his second term, which have been examined less by Cold War historians, maintained a transnational tone of reconciliation that transcended the preexisting divisions and boundaries between the West and the USSR.

The transnational and international outlook of President Reagan is best reflected in his speeches during his second term, which prioritized dialogue over confrontation in his dealings with the Russians and Eastern Europeans behind the Iron Curtain. After acknowledging Gorbachev's attempts to liberalize the Soviet government, Reagan's rhetoric shifted from challenging the Soviet Union in its own backwater to encouraging Gorbachev's reforms. Although the U.S. National Security Council and the State Department warned that a presidential speech in East Germany would be perceived as overly aggressive by Russia,

¹³ R. Rowland and J. Jones, 'Reagan's Strategy for the Cold War and the Evil Empire Address', *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 19(3) (2016), pp. 427-464.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 427-464.

¹⁵ Gaddis, *The United States and the end of the Cold War*, pp. 122-123.

President Reagan's 'Tear Down this Wall' address called upon Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall and to allow for open borders between East and West Germany. Contrary to popular and academic opinion, the overall tone of Reagan's Tear Down the Wall speech mainly resembles a request made towards a potential partner rather than a threat against an opponent. Despite being urged by the moderate members of his administration to strike the line 'Tear Down this Wall,' from the speech, Reagan ultimately decided to keep it after hearing that the East Germans shared the same conviction and would be listening to the speech. Rather than challenging Gorbachev, Reagan was appealing to his reformist tendencies through the bully pulpit of the American presidency.¹⁶ In Finland, President Reagan voiced his respect for the Helsinki Final Act, a transnational, universally recognized human rights agreement signed between 35 countries, even though he previously criticized its adoption before he became president.¹⁷ In another speech at Moscow State University, he stated that the American and Russian people shared a common devotion to freedom, and he made reference to Russian authors to better relate to the young students in the crowd.¹⁸ When asked if he still regarded the Soviet Union as the "evil empire", he replied 'No, I was talking about another time, another era'.¹⁹ The evolving tone of Reagan's rhetoric towards the Soviet Union from one of aggression to one of reconciliation with the Eastern bloc points to a transnational element in his speeches that has been overlooked by contemporary scholarship. The rhetoric of the Reagan Administration upheld the sanctity of transnational, universally recognized human rights standards and displayed respect for the perspectives of Eastern Europeans suffering under the oppression of Soviet Communism and for Gorbachev's reforms. It accordingly played a fundamental role in transforming President Reagan's public image from that of a war hawk to a serious negotiator in the eyes of fellow Americans and the rest of the world.

Standard American Thinking on Europe and the USSR

While it initially stressed a traditional narrative of American exceptionalism triumphing over Soviet Communism (ex. the Ash Heap of History speech), the Reagan Administration's shifting policy towards Europe and Russia gradually espoused a platform of multilateral cooperation with America's European allies, Eastern European peoples beyond the Iron Curtain, and the Kremlin. This changing stance, which has been less examined by Cold War historians, illustrates an internationally oriented aspect of President Reagan's diplomacy that defied traditional domestic perspectives on U.S. foreign policy in both American liberal and conservative camps. As opposed to Nixon's obsession with realpolitik or Carter's fixation on

¹⁶ R. Rowland and J. Jones, 'Reagan at the Brandenburg Gate: Moral Clarity Tempered by Pragmatism', *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 9(1) (2006), pp. 21-50.

¹⁷ 'REAGAN PRAISES HELSINKI ACCORDS' ACHIEVEMENTS', *The Washington Post*, (28 May 1988).

¹⁸ J. Jones and R. Rowland, 'Reagan at Moscow State University: Consubstantiality Underlying Conflict. Rhetoric and Public Affairs', 10(1) (2007), pp. 90.

¹⁹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*, p. 302.

human rights, Reagan's foreign policy was guided by his profound self-belief in American exceptionalism, and he believed that the pervasive influence of Communism abroad posed an existential threat to the free world. While Nixon, who personified the classic grand strategy approach of American foreign policy with his behind-the-scenes meetings with other world leaders like Mao Zedong or Brezhnev, Reagan adopted a more confrontational and moralistic stance against the Soviet Union that transcended the national boundaries carefully constructed by nation-states in the interests of realpolitik. At the same time, he was willing to negotiate with the Soviets if those talks proved fruitful in taming Soviet aggression on the world stage. As noted by Jack Matlock, who was the U.S. Ambassador to Russia during the Reagan Administration, one memorandum by Reagan noted that in 'the world of P.R. we are faced with two domestic elements. One argues that no agreement with the Soviets is worth the time, trouble or paper it's written on so we should dig in our heels and say nyet to any concession. On the other side are those so hungry for an agreement of any kind that they would advise major concessions because a successful summit requires that. My own View is that any agreement must be in the long-term interest of the United States and our allies. We'll sign no other kind'.²⁰ Matlock states that Reagan himself understood his administration was composed of those who subscribed to the former view even if he never abided by it in attending talks with Gorbachev. In the end, President Reagan prioritized the viewpoints of his European allies and made overtures to the Soviets through international diplomatic channels, against the wishes of some of his own more conservative advisers.

Reagan's UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick's scholarship on the distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes demonstrates the limitations of the traditional neoconservative perspective of some members of the Reagan Administration. The fundamental difference, Kirkpatrick argued, was that authoritarian regimes maintained the potential to revert to a democratic system of government while totalitarian regimes were much more consistent in their moral perfidy. In other words, totalitarian regimes such as the Soviet government were far more morally pernicious than authoritarian regimes ever could be and had to be contained at all costs.²¹ In the end, President Reagan, influenced by the advice of the Thatcher government, sided with the moderates in his administration. These advisers pushed for diplomatic talks with the Soviets, in opposition to conservative advisers like Kirkpatrick. Whether it involved improving relations with the Soviets, propping up international proxy forces and opposition groups against Communist governments, or defending the security interests of America's European allies, the flexibility of the US Administration's foreign policy can easily be traced to President Reagan's

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 171.

²¹ G. Connell-Smith, 'The Crisis in Central America: President Reagan's Options', *The World Today*, 39(10) (1983), pp. 385.

transnational/international outlook, which defied traditional, narrow-minded American domestic perspectives on Cold War foreign policy.

President Reagan's Peace Through Strength Strategy Within U.S. Foreign Policy Doctrine

President Reagan's Peace through Strength strategy, often regarded as the hallmark of American unilateralism in the traditional narrative of Cold War historiography, was much more supportive of and reliant upon transnational institutions (NATO), movements (Polish Solidarity), and human rights standards (the Helsinki Final Act) in its confrontation with the USSR than commonly believed. American foreign policy towards the USSR before the Reagan Era stressed the importance of peaceful coexistence with Russia, and such an approach often minimized the security interests of America's European allies or turned a blind eye to the sufferings of Eastern Europeans beyond the Iron Curtain.

As Matlock notes, Reagan's own advisers were split into different camps on how to address Soviet aggression; while the hardcore conservatives pushed for an aggressive foreign policy towards Russia, the moderates advocated for a more relaxed stance that bore a similar resemblance to the détente tradition practiced by the Carter administration. As it pursued talks with the Russians through international, non-American diplomatic channels to improve U.S.-Russian relations, the Reagan Administration's diplomacy of peace through strength brought the Soviets to the negotiating table and held them to their promises in such a manner that it protected interests of its European allies and promoted goodwill among Eastern Europeans beyond the Iron Curtain. Unlike any other presidential administration before it, the Reagan Administration's policy of peace through strength, while unilaterally exercising American military prowess in the face of Soviet aggression, also managed to successfully incorporate the long-term interests of its allies and of various peoples suffering under Communist oppression in its diplomacy and rhetoric. The multilayered nature of the Reagan Administration's foreign policy illustrates a commitment to multilateralism that has been less examined by Cold War scholars.

Arms Control

The transnational and international agency of the Reagan Administration's arms control diplomacy is best exemplified in its attempt to defend the security interests of America's European allies to an extent that was unheard of for preceding presidential administrations. Its cooperation with NATO, a transnational institution, against Soviet aggression in Europe often bore wide-ranging implications for the security of the European continent that spanned the boundaries of one particular country. It also successfully persuaded America's European allies of the importance of aligning with the U.S. government's outlook on arms control diplomacy with the Soviets. When the USSR deployed new missiles, the Carter administration considered its existing defence measures to be capable of addressing the threat, but

America's allies in Western European bloc urged for more proactive deterrence measures to be taken against the Soviets. As noted by Garthoff, 'as apparent European concerns and interest in a positive sign from Washington grew, the American leadership decided to support a new deployment, not because it was believed by most policymakers to be necessary for deterrence or defense against the Soviet Union, but because it would demonstrate to the Allies the responsiveness of the United States to their concerns, as well as American leadership in organizing a positive Alliance decision'.²² However, 'uneasiness, however, began to appear in some of the NATO countries as the project clearly started to move toward a formal and public decision. Some, particularly in northern European NATO countries, questioned the need for taking a firm deployment decision before trying to reach agreement on limitations. West European unease was also stimulated by a curious and remarkable public speech by Henry Kissinger in Brussels in September on the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of NATO, in which he questioned the credibility of the American nuclear guarantee'.²³ The European reaction to American deterrence measures against the Russians was clearly mixed; while America's European allies hoped that the Carter Administration would take a firmer stand against the USSR, they were wary of also the heightened tensions resulting from a premature arms buildup. While most traditional historians credit the Reagan Administration with leading the Western European bloc in its confrontation with the Soviet Union, the influence of America's European allies on President Reagan's defence policy demonstrates that the reverse may have been true.

Reagan's announcement of the U.S. government's construction of a new missile defence system, the Star Wars Defence Initiative, in response to Soviet nuclear proliferation, provoked much apprehension from the Kremlin and America's European allies. As noted by Lucas, Europeans worried 'that SDI would restore a "fortress America" attitude, thus effectively decoupling Europe from the United States and leaving Europe vulnerable to Soviet conventional aggression; that SDI would undercut current efforts to improve NATO's conventional forces and would create new pressures for Europeans to increase defense spending; that it would provoke Soviet fears of an American first strike and therefore prove to be destabilizing; that it would spell the end of arms control and the antiballistic missile (ABM) treaty and would set off a new offensive arms race; and that by encouraging Moscow to go forward with its own ballistic missile defense, it would nullify the smaller independent nuclear deterrents of Britain and France'.²⁴

The Reagan Administration, recognizing the strategic importance of the Western European bloc in regard to arms control diplomacy, courted their governments for their acquiescence in relation to SDI. 'Faced with this European consensus, the Reagan administration eventually got the message that if it wanted to

²² R. Garthoff, 'The NATO Decision on Theater Nuclear Forces', *Political Science Quarterly*, 98(2) (1983), pp. 197.

²³ Ibid, pp. 197.

²⁴ M. Lucas, 'SDI and Europe', *World Policy Journal*, 3(2) (1986), pp. 221.

win "alliance support" it would have to change its line. Accordingly, the administration shifted its tactics, from stressing SDI as a space-based weapons system to playing up SDI as a "research program" that would yield substantial benefits for the civilian as well as military sectors of the economy. As part of this change in focus, Lt. General James Abrahamson, the director of the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO) announced, in congressional testimony later widely circulated to foreign officials, that Mrs. Thatcher's Four Points were now goals of the SDI'.²⁵ Furthermore, a 'successful campaign for a NATO consensus on a new LRTNF deployment initiative now became a major goal of American policy. The White House, the Defense Department, and the State Department by the end of 1978 had come into accord that a TNF success would serve several purposes: it would reestablish domestic American political confidence in the administration's handling of Alliance and nuclear weapons affairs; it would reconfirm American readiness to meet European needs and desires'.²⁶

'Despite these various European concerns, the Reagan administration... gradually enticed European governments into giving their conditional blessing to SDI research, partly by agreeing to their stipulation that the ABM treaty not be violated and partly by portraying SDI as a generously funded research program for the development of new military and civilian technologies. In December, the United States signed a memorandum of understanding with Britain concerning its participation in SDI. And as this went to press, similar agreements were expected to be signed soon with West Germany and Italy'.²⁷ Furthermore, the 'Reagan administration also decided to honor a 1979 NATO decision that called for the deployment of U.S. nuclear missiles in Europe. This "dual track decision" as the NATO agreement came to be known, had been made in response to the Soviet deployment of mobile SS-20 missiles aimed at Western Europe. It called for the NATO allies to pursue arms limitation talks with the Warsaw Pact in order to reduce the SS-20 threat. At the same time, however, the United States would deploy intermediate-range Pershing II and cruise missiles in Western Europe to counterbalance the Soviet SS-20s'.²⁸ On this note, the Reagan administration, unlike the Carter administration, was more mindful of the security interests of its European allies which tended to neglect those interests to pursue détente with the Soviets. While traditional historians correctly assert that the Reagan Administration primarily led the West in its confrontation with the USSR, the influence of America's European allies on the direction of U.S. defence policy demonstrates that the Western European bloc also played an essential role in undermining Soviet aggression.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 222.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 222.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 219.

²⁸ B. A. Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal : Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia, 1997).

Able Archer Incident

Intelligence sharing between the Reagan Administration and the Thatcher government during the 1983 Able Archer incident, which nearly resulted in nuclear war between the USSR and the West, was ultimately responsible for transforming President Reagan's foreign policy towards Russia from one of aggression to one of cooperation. As noted by DiCicco, 'The US/NATO plan to install Pershing II missiles in West Germany was a difficult challenge facing the Soviets. NATO countries' December 1979 "dual-track decision" called for the modernization of nuclear missile capabilities in Western Europe, including the deployment of INF in West Germany. Pending approval from West Germany, installation of the new weapons system would begin in late 1983'.²⁹ However, these arrangements did not go unnoticed by the Soviets, who perceived the deployment of the missiles as a direct threat and launched a covert operation to monitor the likelihood of a nuclear attack from the Western bloc. The implementation of Able Archer, a military exercise by America and its NATO allies, would 'include nearly all of Western and Southern Europe, from the Nordic countries to the Mediterranean Sea, and it would involve hundreds of thousands of military and civilian personnel. For the first time, Able Archer was to include the highest levels of command of the US government, including the President and Vice President'.³⁰ The extensive operational planning surrounding the implementation of Able Archer serves as further evidence of the transnational nature of the Reagan Administration's cooperation with NATO.

Beth Fischer's *The Reagan Reversal* argues that Reagan changed his previously hawkish stance on U.S. foreign policy towards Russia to one aimed at reconciliation after reports from MI6 stated that the Kremlin had misinterpreted Able Archer as a pre-planned nuclear strike on the Soviet Union. The Americans acquired this information as a result of the close cooperation between the American and British intelligence communities, and the reports themselves, as Fischer notes, 'came from Oleg Gordievsky, who, although he was the deputy chief of the KGB station in London, was working with the British intelligence agency, MI6. Gordievsky had passed along many Soviet documents that had proved valuable for the Western allies. The United States had scant information about the Soviet leadership, and the KGB official's reports gave Washington insight into Soviet strategic thinking and their paranoia regarding attack'.³¹ Most historians and 'historical accounts agree... that Gordievsky led British and American officials to believe that high-level Soviet officials feared that Able Archer 83 augured an offensive strike by NATO'.³² Upon the launch of the Able Archer, the Kremlin, fearful of a potential

²⁹ J. DiCicco, 'Fear, Loathing, and Cracks in Reagan's Mirror Images: Able Archer 83 and an American First Step toward Rapprochement in the Cold War', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 7(3) (2011), pp. 259.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 260.

³¹ B. A. Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal*, p. 132-133.

³² J. DiCicco, 'Fear, Loathing, and Cracks in Reagan's Mirror Images', p. 261.

attack, put its forces in Eastern Europe on high alert. According to Gordievsky, the Soviets genuinely believed that the US and its European allies were going to launch a surprise nuclear strike.

In the end, the British intelligence network completely changed the perspective of the Reagan Administration in regard to the importance of a more transparent relationship with the Soviet Union. After the British government passed on Gordievsky's intelligence to the Reagan Administration, Reagan himself realized that the 'more experience I had with Soviet leaders and [those] who knew them, the more I began to realize that many Soviet officials feared us not only as adversaries, but as potential aggressors who might hurl nuclear weapons at them in a first strike Well, if that was the case, I was even more anxious to get a top leader in a room alone and try to convince him we had no designs on the Soviet Union'.³³

International Diplomatic Channels to Moscow

While the traditional school often stresses the role of American hard power in bringing an end to the Cold War and the USSR's capitulation, Reagan's overtures to Gorbachev often relied on the use of international diplomatic channels involving America's allies to bring the Russians to the negotiating table. Archie Brown's *The Human Factor* argues that Margaret Thatcher and the international outlook of the British Foreign Office played an essential role in setting up the negotiations between the Americans and the Russians. Brown notes that following 'Reagan's evil empire speech and launch of the SDI project in March of the same year, relations between the NATO countries and the Soviet Union and its East European allies had deteriorated further. The Foreign Office were concerned about this and so were two of its people who now held the most senior positions on the 10 Downing Street staff- Parsons and the private secretary to the prime minister. They played an important part in persuading Thatcher that the time was ripe for a new analysis of Britain's relations with Soviet Union and Eastern Europe'.³⁴ He also observes that initially 'Thatcher had been highly skeptical of the Foreign Office view that more active engagement with the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe... Yet, from September 1983 she accepted, and fully participated in, the move to closer engagement with both the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe'.³⁵ Furthermore, by 1984, she was 'already playing an active role in the new policy of enhanced engagement with Communist Europe'.³⁶

³³ D. Oberdorfer, *A New Era, From the Cold War to a New Era: The United States and the Soviet Union, 1983–1991*. (Baltimore, 1998), pp. 67

³⁴ A. Brown, *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher, and the End of the Cold War* (Oxford, 2020) pp 111.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 118, p. 122.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 119.

Thatcher's subsequent involvement in U.S. foreign policy towards Russia was vital in swaying Reagan to the side of moderates within his own Administration. Brown argues that 'Thatcher's credentials as a Cold Warrior made her support for engagement with the Soviet Union and her relative optimism about Gorbachev all the more useful for those in the State Department, including Shultz himself, whom hard-liners in the Reagan administration regarded with suspicion'.³⁷ Furthermore, 'the position she took became a significant element in intra-administration debates'.³⁸ For his part, Gorbachev also hoped that Britain would 'to the extent of its possibilities, ... facilitate the fruitful course of Soviet/American Summit dialogue and the general amelioration of the world political climate'.³⁹

On a personal level, Reagan's own interactions with Gorbachev, as they unfolded from a state of cautious optimism to one of genial warmth and friendship, brought a new sense of openness and transparency to U.S.-Russian relations. The influence of the Thatcher government and of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the Reagan Administration's foreign policy towards the USSR advanced the negotiations between the Russians and Americans to a more fruitful stage of progress and transparency in Cold War US-Russian relations. The three-way partnership between the Reagan Administration, Thatcher's government, and Gorbachev's Politburo serves as another example of how the international outlook of a non-American/non-Russian actor (the Thatcher government) redirected the diplomacy of the Reagan Administration towards the USSR and led to the gradual relaxation of tensions with Moscow.

Four Summits

Heralded as a breakthrough in U.S.-Russian relations, the four summits between President Reagan and Soviet premier Gorbachev are commonly framed by scholars as a classic Cold War grand strategy narrative of two superpowers prioritizing their own interests through diplomatic talks. In actuality, during these various negotiations, the Reagan Administration upheld universally recognized, transnational human rights standards (e.g. the Helsinki Final Act) and defended the security interests of America's European allies in order to further acquire international support in its struggle against the spectre of Soviet Communism. In 1981, Alexander Haig stated that the 'administration required "the Soviet Union [to] cease and desist from instigating, supporting, and carrying out efforts to effect historic change by force, whether it be done through proxy or the direct involvement of Soviet forces At times it pertained to the making and fulfilling of international agreements. "What do we want of the Soviet Union?" Haig asked in the summer of 1981. "We want greater Soviet restraint on the use of force. We want greater

³⁷ Ibid, p. 120.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 138.

³⁹ Letter, Mikhail Gorbachev to Margaret Thatcher, Tuesday 30 September 1986, accessed via <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/143845>, 5 February 2021.

Soviet respect for the independence of others. And we want the Soviets to abide by their reciprocal obligations, such as those undertaken in the Helsinki accord'.⁴⁰

Haig's referencing of the Helsinki accord to lend the U.S. government the moral high ground over the Soviets in regard to human rights issues highlights another transnational aspect of the Reagan Administration's foreign policy. As noted by Beth Fischer, 'Reagan officials also made summit meetings contingent upon Soviet behavior. In March 1981, Walter Cronkite asked President Reagan whether he was planning to hold a summit meeting with General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. The president indicated that certain preconditions had to be met first. "I think that it would help bring about such a meeting if the Soviet Union revealed that it is willing to moderate its imperialism; its aggression [against] Afghanistan would be an example," Reagan explained. "We could talk a lot better if there was some indication that they truly wanted to be a member of the peace-loving nations of the world, the free world'.⁴¹

At the Geneva Summit in 1985, the talks between the Americans and the Russians fell short of both sides' goal for a reduced level of nuclear arms. On the other hand, responses to the Reykjavik summit meeting in October 1986 between Mr Mikhail Gorbachev and President Ronald Reagan reflected the recurrent anxiety that besets European governments as they contemplate an arms agreement limiting weapons on which the NATO security guarantee is thought to depend. It should be noted, however, that not all European leaders concurred in their assessments of the requirements for extended deterrence'.⁴² At best, allied reactions to negotiations between Washington and the Kremlin were mixed; 'while the process of Soviet- American negotiation appears to reassure most Europeans, the prospect of the two superpowers actually coming to an agreement that imposes constraints on American nuclear weapons usually generates alarm among defence and foreign policy establishments in Bonn, Paris and London'.⁴³ While Gorbachev attempted to limit the discussions to the reduction of nuclear arms, President Reagan included other topics such as human rights and the Soviet oppression of political dissidents and Jews, which highlighted his more international/transnational outlook.⁴⁴

At the summit's end, 'NATO foreign ministers communicated their approval of the results of the Reykjavik Summit to Secretary of State George Shultz in Brussels, Belgium, following the summit meeting in Iceland. Likewise, NATO defense ministers communicated their approval to Secretary of

⁴⁰ A. Haig, 'A Strategic Approach to American Foreign Policy', *Department of State Bulletin*, 81:2054 (1981), pp. 12.

⁴¹ B. Fischer, 'Toeing the Hardline? The Reagan Administration and the Ending of the Cold War', *Political Science Quarterly*, 112(3) (1997), pp. 481.

⁴² J. M. O. Sharp, *After Reykjavik: Arms Control and the Allies*, *International Affairs*, 63(2) (1987), pp. 239.

⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 240.

⁴⁴ R. L. Garthoff, *The great transition: American-Soviet relations and the end of the Cold War* (Washington D.C., 1994), pp 252-299.

Defense Casper Weinberger in Scotland. Both Shultz and Weinberger reported very positive meetings'.⁴⁵ As noted by Davis, 'Gorbachev apparently did not expect such a response from Western Europe's leaders, and he complained bitterly about it in an address televised in the Soviet Union'.⁴⁶ The success of the Reagan Administration's transnational agency in its diplomacy with the Soviets is highlighted in the widespread approval that it received from NATO, a transnational institution.

The INF treaty signed between Mr. Gorbachev and President Reagan serves as a prime example of how U.S. foreign policy towards Russia upheld the interests of America's European allies. In contrast to the Carter Administration which ignored the security interests of America's European allies in the interest of détente with Russia, the Reagan Administration considered those interests as it pursued further negotiations with the Soviets. As noted by Davis, 'After negotiations resumed in 1985, Secretary Gorbachev, to most everyone's surprise, changed tactics and over the next two years acquiesced, in turn, to American demands for an agreement covering missiles and not aircraft, to establishing equal ceilings, to eliminating all inf missiles in Europe, to excluding limits on British and French nuclear forces, to including collateral constraints on shorter range missiles'.⁴⁷ In summation, the INF treaty serves as a prime example of how the Reagan Administration, unlike preceding presidential administrations, ultimately preserved the security interests of America's European allies as it negotiated arms reductions with the Soviets.

While Reagan and Gorbachev were opponents in a clash that has been traditionally represented by historians as a zero-sum game between two super-powers, both men brought an international outlook to their diplomacy that eschewed the narrow-minded, limited perspectives of their domestic supporters. Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia Jack F. Matlock believes that Reagan was careful not to offend Russia's pride as a country or Gorbachev's standing as a leader in the eyes of his people. He noted that Reagan stated that 'We must always remember our main goal, and his [Gorbachev] need to show his strength to the Soviet gang back in the Kremlin. Let's not limit the area where he can do that to those things that have to do with aggression outside the Soviet Union'.⁴⁸ In a testament to the internationally-oriented extent of his diplomatic thought, President Reagan recognized the dangers of forcing Gorbachev into making too many concessions and humiliating Russia's sense of dignity as a nation-state on the world stage even if his conservative supporters may have disagreed with his more moderate stance.

⁴⁵ B. Howell, 'Reagan and Reykjavik: Arms Control, SDI, and the Argument from Human Rights', *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 11(3) (2008), pp. 390.

⁴⁶ Howell, 'Reagan and Reykjavik', p. 390.

⁴⁷ L. Davis, 'Lessons of the INF Treaty', *Foreign Affairs*, 66(4) (1988), pp. 720-734.

⁴⁸ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, p. 152.

The Reagan Doctrine, Polish Solidarity, and the European Reaction

The Reagan Doctrine, the foundation of the Reagan Administration's foreign policy on addressing the threat of Communism, further illustrates President Reagan's transnational outlook on U.S. foreign policy because he attempted to support various anti-Communist uprisings across the world that were often not confined to the boundaries of one nation-state. In fact, many of them, if they were successful, often had transnational implications in that they reshaped the geographic boundaries of the regions within which they were taking place. Dedicated towards containing the global spread of Communism, the Reagan Doctrine marked the most significant attempt by a sitting president to address Russian aggression through both overt and covert methods since President Truman's Doctrine of containment. In his State of the Union Address, Reagan announced the doctrine's creation, which was his pledge to assist anti-communist forces across the globe in their struggle against the spread of Communism. Although the Reagan Doctrine seemed to exemplify yet another case of American unilateral overreach and intervention into foreign countries, it was quite transnational/international in its outlook as exemplified by the Reagan Administration's support of the Polish Solidarity Movement.

The transnational nature of the Reagan Doctrine is perhaps best exemplified in the U.S. government's backing of the Polish Solidarity Movement, a civil resistance movement against Communist rule over Poland, which also inspired the region-wide 1989 Revolutions against Soviet-backed governments across the Eastern bloc. In its effort to challenge the Communist oppression of the Polish people, the Reagan Administration partnered with Pope John Paul II, a native Pole, to discuss cooperation between the U.S. and the Vatican to support Solidarity. Both the U.S. government and the Vatican pledged tens of millions to Solidarity, ensuring the movement's survival even as the Soviet-aligned Polish government imposed martial law on its own people.

Marie Gayte's *The Vatican and The Reagan Administration* argues that 'a closer look at the nature of the relationship indicates that, although the United States and the Vatican had a convergence of interests, this did not mean that the Holy See backed all American initiatives, for the Vatican pursued its own agenda and was not likely to change its stance simply to satisfy the United States'.⁴⁹ While the Reagan Administration perceived 'its interactions with the Holy See solely through the prism of East-West relationship... the Vatican of Pope John Paul II, although undeniably moved by very strong concerns about communism, pursued its own agenda as a church consistent with the legacies of John XXIII'.⁵⁰ Therefore, 'the need to secure Vatican support for key U.S. foreign policy decisions is one factor that

⁴⁹ M. Gayte, 'THE VATICAN AND THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION: A COLD WAR ALLIANCE?', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 97(4) (2011), pp. 744.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp.714.

motivated the decision to establish diplomatic relations on January 10, 1984, when Reagan appointed Wilson as the first U.S. ambassador to the Holy See'.⁵¹

The U.S. government's reliance on the moral authority of the Vatican to justify its support of the Polish Solidarity movement highlights the more multilateral aspects of President Reagan's foreign policy that have been overlooked by traditional historians. As Gayte further notes, 'it seems that the need to influence the Vatican and secure its support for U.S. foreign and defense policy decisions (or, at least, prevent any pronouncement that could be interpreted as critical) took center stage in the relationship. The administration sought Vatican endorsement for several reasons: first, to occupy the moral high ground as the Soviet Union tried to promote its image as "peace-maker," and second, to offset critics at home who were challenging the morality of certain U.S. foreign policy options such as support for the contras in Nicaragua or nuclear deterrence as the cornerstone of defense policy. Representatives from several religious denominations were among the critics, with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops as one of the most vocal groups'.⁵² It was towards the end of weakening Soviet control over the Warsaw Pact countries that the Reagan Administration utilized international diplomatic channels to support movements such as Polish solidarity with transnational effects that ultimately weakened Soviet control over the Eastern bloc.

On the other hand, the limitations of the Reagan Administration's transnational diplomacy were best reflected in the reactions of America's European allies to its support of Solidarity, which initially ranged from mixed to disapproving. As MacDonald notes, 'there were important differences among the Europeans, and admissions of uncertainty all round about the course of events inside Poland, was less important as the crisis unraveled than that the United States had from the outset asserted the crisis in the Socialist Commonwealth to be a crisis of East- West relations. But the European allies, even as their misgivings grew in the face of grim evidence of repression, strove to avoid actions against the Soviet Union or Poland'.⁵³ Essentially, America's European allies initially disagreed with the hawkish stance that the Reagan Administration adopted in response to the ensuing crisis in Poland. Furthermore, in 'refusing to accept the Washington line, the West Europeans triggered a crisis of leadership which had been growing within the Alliance throughout the Reagan Administration's first year. For, even as the active policies of the United States had become more centrist under pressure of domestic and international circumstance the pre-emptive ideology with which the Republicans approached international politics - and above all their claim to be Realists who would treat the Soviet Union in terms well understood in Moscow - seemed less and less plausible and more and more dangerous in the eventuality of a

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 724.

⁵² Ibid, p. 724.

⁵³ H. MacDonald, 'The Western Alliance and the Polish Crisis', *The World Today*, 38(2) (1982), pp. 42.

super-power'.⁵⁴ Even though members of NATO were mindful of their own security interests, they were unwilling to be drawn into a much larger and potentially more dangerous conflict with the USSR.

Slowly, America's European allies grew more understanding of the Reagan Administration's approach towards Russia, but they initially refused to join in punitive measures against the USSR and its allies. As MacDonald further observes, at first, 'all European countries were agreed about one thing - they would not follow the American lead in imposing sanctions against Poland and the Soviet Union'.⁵⁵ Soon however, despite 'continuing disagreements, a cohesive Alliance position began to emerge with the Nato special ministerial meeting in Brussels on 11 January. Perhaps surprisingly in view of what had gone before, it was West European attitudes that were reflected in the operative parts and tone of the communiqué. The Allies did not adopt sanctions against Poland or the Soviet Union, but agreed to draw up a set of measures to be implemented if the situation in Poland did not improve. The Soviet Union was condemned for its 'sustained campaign' against the 'efforts of the Polish people for national renewal and reform', and for 'its active support for the subsequent systematic suppression of those efforts', all of which was deemed inconsistent with the Final principles of the Helsinki Final Act'.⁵⁶

The measures that the Reagan Administration adopted to support the Polish Solidarity Movement ultimately inspired America's European allies to assume a similar stance, which contributed to the unravelling of the web of Soviet control across the Eastern bloc. Regarding the initial issue of whether or not the West should have supported Polish Solidarity, MacDonald asks and explains 'How has this led to disagreement between the allies? It has been argued that the European allies should follow American leadership in imposing sanctions against the Soviet Union, for the latter is attempting to uphold an obsolete and redundant pattern of international relations in Europe, the 'Yalta system', based upon un-tenable exclusive spheres of influence. Whereas the European allies of the United States seek to transcend the Yalta system by natural economic and social evolutions, reinforced at appropriate stages by formalized agreements which might then serve as 'points of pressure', or foci of deterrence, conceived as a mixture of economic carrots and sticks, the American view of transcending Yalta suggests that contracts are exchanged in advance, and indeed that reciprocity and linkage may operate tacitly'.⁵⁷ Regardless of the differing motives guiding all of the various actors, the Reagan Administration successfully persuaded its European allies of the importance in confronting the USSR and secured the backing of the Vatican, which highlights a clear commitment to multilateralism in its foreign policy that dislodged Russia's dominance over Eastern Europe.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 42.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 46.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 47.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 49.

The End of the Cold War

The transnational nature of the circumstances surrounding the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the USSR rebut the argument advanced by the traditional school of thought that American hard power single handedly forced the demise of Communism. As exemplified by the Polish Solidarity movement, the secession of various Soviet vassal states, and the Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan, the fall of the USSR involved multiple actors and accordingly requires a transnational lens of analysis on the part of historians. However, on the other hand, American power, both hard and soft, certainly played a role in hastening the USSR's fall by propping up the very internal domestic movements and actors that ultimately acted as the final catalyst for the Soviet Union's dissolution. On that note, historians have not been as forthcoming in acknowledging the role of American soft power and diplomacy in contributing to the dissolution of the USSR.

Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan serves as one example of how American foreign policy utilized transnational, non-American actors (the mujahedeen) across the national boundaries of nation-states and international diplomatic channels to force the Russians to the negotiating table. In turn, this ensured the subsequent Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, which ultimately proved to be a significant factor in the USSR's collapse. American military power alone did not ensure the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan; rather, the Reagan Administration utilized international diplomatic channels to convince the Soviets to slowly extricate themselves from the conflict. The Geneva Accords between Pakistan, a U.S. ally, and the Afghan government, a Soviet proxy state, with the U.S. and the USSR acting as guarantors, stipulated that all parties would abide by the principles of non-intervention as the Soviet army began withdrawing from the region.⁵⁸

Revolutions of 1989

The Polish Solidarity Movement's success in bringing democracy to Poland, which likely would not have happened without America's support, resulted in a domino effect of cascading transnational implications. Due to the influence of Polish Solidarity, other revolutions erupted against Soviet-backed governments in the Warsaw Pact. Celeste Wallander's scholarship discusses the essential importance of the Polish Solidarity movement in inspiring the other various movements that shook off Soviet dominance in

⁵⁸ M. Ali, 'GENEVA ACCORDS AND THE SUPERPOWERS', *Pakistan Horizon*, 41(3) (1988), pp. 105-126.

Eastern Europe.⁵⁹ Consequently, these uprisings directly led to the overthrow of the various communist governments in the Eastern bloc and the ultimate dissolution of the USSR. However, these movements, while being propped up by support from the West, also owed their continued existence to Gorbachev's reforms. Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (economic restructuring), which led to the gradual whittling down of Soviet military forces, allowed for anti-communist opposition groups to gradually emerge from the underground.⁶⁰

The U.S. government's role in negotiations over Germany's reunification highlights that American foreign policymakers in the George H.W. Bush administration continued the Reagan Administration's much broader, transnational strategy on American foreign policy towards Europe. By prioritizing the interests of the newly unified Germany, which would serve as an important check against Russia, over the interests of America's traditional allies such as Britain and France, the Bush Administration was playing the longer game of acquiring another useful ally against the Soviets. However, private reactions among America's NATO allies to the prospect of German reunification were much more mixed than expected. While America supported the unification of Germany and its subsequent membership in NATO, Britain and France, which had long viewed Germany as a threat to the stability of Europe, were much more hesitant.⁶¹ The negotiations over the reunification of Germany resulted in a transnational transformation of Europe's geographic boundaries as it motivated NATO to expand further eastwards. Scholars and politicians continue to debate over whether the U.S. government promised the Soviets that NATO would not expand eastwards out of consideration for the region which Russia deemed within its traditional, historical sphere of influence. While some historians and politicians argue that the West promised Russia that it would not expand, others, Gorbachev among them, state that the West granted no formal commitment to Moscow that it would not expand into the former Eastern bloc.⁶²

Ultimately, the foreign policy of America and its European allies played a crucial yet subtle role in bringing democracy to Eastern Europe. The Reagan Administration's continued support of various internal opposition groups within the Warsaw Pact ensured that Gorbachev ultimately had no choice but to recognize their legitimacy. Wallander notes that 'Western policies—and in this instance more the policies of the West European countries than those of the United States—were important in sustaining the hopes and processes of the Helsinki Final Act. Helsinki established the legitimacy of human and minority

⁵⁹ C. Wallander, 'Western Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 5(4) (2003), pp. 145-153.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 145-153.

⁶¹ K. Spohr, 'German Unification: Between Official History, Academic Scholarship, and Political Memoirs', *The Historical Journal*, 43(3) (2000), pp. 869-888.

⁶² J. R. I. Shiffrin, 'Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion', *International Security*, 40:4 (2016), pp. 7-44.

rights in Europe and provided indirect support and inspiration to the political dissident movements in Poland and Czechoslovakia, allowing them to move forward once Gorbachev opened the possibilities of reform. These political groups and leaders were thus well-positioned and experienced to take the initiative when the opportunity naturally arose'.⁶³ However, in some respects, this is a rather naïve interpretation; if the U.S. government and the Vatican did not initially cooperate together to prop up the Polish Solidarity movement, the demands made by America's European allies of the Soviet Union would never have taken place. In turn, the Polish Solidarity movement may never have served as a catalyst for the series of revolutions that took place in the Eastern bloc.

Collapse of the USSR and NATO's Eastern Expansion

The revolutions that swept Central and Eastern Europe proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back regarding the stability of the Soviet Union. As countries within the Warsaw Pact broke away from Moscow, the Gang of Eight, a splinter faction of the Kremlin's political and military elite, launched an August coup against Gorbachev. The coup attempt, which failed after the newly elected Russian president Boris Yelstin suppressed the uprising with the aid of the Russian military, seriously destabilized the authority of the Kremlin in the eyes of Soviet satellite states. Various Soviet republics in the Baltic and Central Asia declared their independence, and Gorbachev announced the dissolution of the Soviet Union and resigned from office, marking the birth of modern Russia. Historians and political scientists continue to argue over whether the West promised Russia that NATO would not expand further into Eastern Europe, which Russia deemed its sphere of influence. Many largely agree that Western diplomats informally promised Russian leaders that NATO would not infringe in the former Eastern bloc, Russia's traditional sphere of influence in Europe.⁶⁴ As noted by Joshua R. Izkowitz Shiffrin, 'U.S. policies were structured to block Soviet influence over German reunification while still giving the appearance of accommodating Soviet concerns. Under these circumstances, Soviet troops would be gone from Central and Eastern Europe, Soviet influence would be reduced, and the Soviet Union would be in no position to challenge U.S. policies'.⁶⁵ Ultimately, even if revisionists are correct in their assertion that Gorbachev and his fellow reformers played the most essential role in the breakup of the Soviet Union, the flexibility of the Reagan and H.W. Bush administrations in adapting to and taking advantage of the transnational circumstances of the USSR's sudden decline played a crucial role in NATO's eastern expansion. The enlargement of NATO in the former Eastern bloc, in turn, further reinforced reassertion of Western dominance over Russia.

⁶³ Wallander, 'Western Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union', p. 169.

⁶⁴ Shiffrin, 'Deal or No Deal?', p. 8

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 34.

Conclusion

Various schools of thought, which often interpret the history of the Cold War through a binary and narrow-minded grand strategy lens, often problematically argue about what single factor resulted in the downfall of the USSR. In doing so, they often overemphasize the role of certain nation-states and geographic boundaries within the broader trajectory of the historiography. On the other hand, a transnational historian would accurately frame the cooperation between the Reagan Administration, the Western and Eastern European blocs, and the Kremlin as playing an equal and collective effort in dismantling the Soviet Communist system.

At President Reagan's funeral in 2004, Margaret Thatcher solemnly remarked that he had won the Cold War without firing a shot. However, in this preoccupation with recasting the story of the Cold War as an American victory or a Russian defeat, it is easy to forget the role of a once divided Europe which, in the words of Pope John Paul II, stood transnationally 'united from the Atlantic to the Urals' after President Reagan's Tear Down the Wall Address.⁶⁶ Perceived in a different light then, perhaps, the true victors of this conflict were the Europeans themselves, 'women, young people, and men', who in John Paul's own words, possessed by an 'irresistible thirst for freedom ... brought down walls and opened doors' to finish the evil empire.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Lee Edwards, 'John Paul II: Winning the Cold War', *The Knight-Ridder Tribune wire*, (2005), pp. 1. <https://www.heritage.org/commentary/john-paul-ii-winning-the-cold-war>

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

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